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EDITORIAL NOTES

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RECOLLECTIONS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE CIVIL WAR

HAMILTON BUSBEY

WHEN the Hungarian patriot, Kossuth, came to the United States in the latter part of December, 1851, he found a responsive soul in William T. Coggshell, at one time editor of the *Ohio State Journal*, but who died of fever when United States Minister to Ecuador. Mr. Coggshell toured the country with Kossuth and introduced him in Kentucky to James F. Robinson, a slave-holder, who was proud of his Revolutionary ancestors, and in Illinois to Abraham Lincoln, who was made to feel by his conditions of birth and boyhood in Kentucky, that all men are not equal in opportunity at the threshold of life. Change of environment added to the stature of Lincoln. North of the Ohio River there was more freedom for him than in the State of his nativity, and he became the standard bearer of those who were opposed to the domination of slavery. He was moved to action by the same liberty-loving spirit which lifted Kossuth above his fellow men. Attempts to disrupt the Union after he had been elected President of the United States, saddened Lincoln, but did not undermine his courage. At a reception given to him by Governor Dennison of Ohio, the bright-eyed young daughter of Mr. Coggshell attracted his attention, and taking her by the hand he stooped and kissed her on the left cheek. The child blushed and asked:

“Mr. President, what shall you do when you get to Washington?”

Placing his hand on the head of the girl he slowly and pathetically said:

“What shall I do? Ask God. He knows best. But you, little one, can say when you grow up, that Abraham Lincoln bent half way to meet you.”

The South American fever which proved fatal to William T. Coggshell, ended the life of his brilliant daughter; but the mother of the girl, a slender, gray-haired, dignified woman, is still with us, and it was from her that I recently heard the story.

When the Southern States began to secede and it looked as if the Republic of Washington and Jefferson was doomed, James F. Robinson, listening to the call of fellow citizens, left his law office, his banking interests and his stock farm at Georgetown, to become Governor of Kentucky. The fact that he had worn ruffled shirts when Lincoln was wearing cheap hickory shirts, made him more acceptable to powerful factions than a radical from the mountain districts, and he preserved to the Stars and Stripes the autonomy of the State.

The only daughter of Robinson, a woman of rare beauty and tact, presided over the executive mansion at Frankfort, and checked to a marked degree development of the spirit of bitterness. The Governor had the respect of leading Kentuckians who wore the Gray and the Blue, and used his persuasive powers upon both. His daughter made more than one urgent plea to the military authorities for the pardon of young men, mere boys, fired by Southern enthusiasm, who were captured in Confederate uniforms and lodged in Federal prisons.

Recently, in Washington, I stood with uncovered head in the unpretentious room in which Abraham Lincoln died, and brushed the dust and cobwebs from the tablets of memory. I was eighteen years old when Lincoln and Douglas canvassed Illinois for the senatorship of that State, and the speeches which commanded the attention of the nation profoundly impressed me.

In my uncle's house at Tuscola I met an industrious lawyer whose fame now covers two hemispheres,—the Hon. Joseph G. Cannon, Speaker of the House of Representatives. Although not born in the breezy West, he adapted himself to the customs of the country, and his strong face and direct speech commanded respect. The rapid rise of Illinois to power and greatness in the sisterhood of States was due to the sterling virtues of men like Mr. Cannon. Abraham Lincoln had been nominated by his party for President of the United States, and the enthusiasm of the plain people swept Illinois like a prairie fire. I remember a drive of thirty odd miles to hear one of the Lincoln supporters, Owen Lovejoy, speak. The bed of the farm wagon was thickly strewn with hay and straw, and I went to sleep with the stars blinking at the moon. The dreams of youth were optimistic and the fragrance of flowers came to us with

the breeze, which heralded the crimson glow of morning. In the throng which heard the speaking there were hundreds who had driven more miles across the prairie than we had done, and they remained for the torchlight procession. It was a wonderful campaign, and it is not strange that the figure of Abraham Lincoln towered high in youthful imagination.

The ballots of November were counted, and Lincoln succeeded James Buchanan as the sixteenth President of the United States. The result was a bitter disappointment to the slave-holding States and the land was convulsed with strife. The issue as to whether one flag or two flags should float over the territory embraced in the government founded by Washington and his compatriots was long in doubt, and on more than one field I saw the smoke and heard the roar of battle. There were days and months and years of anxiety and blood-letting, and the timid who watched from afar the strife which paralyzed industry, made desolate the homes of peace and plenty, and turned sweet valleys and romantic hillsides into cemeteries, asked if it was not a fearful price to pay for an advance step in civilization.

The fortitude and hopeful patience of Lincoln in dark hours compelled admiration, and his words in his 1858 debate with Douglas were recalled: "I believe this Government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South." A year after these words had been spoken, the John Brown tragedy at Harper's Ferry took place, and twelve months after the execution of Brown, December 20th, 1860, South Carolina declared its secession from the Union. President Lincoln and Vice-President Hamlin were inaugurated March 4th, 1861, and wise men hesitated to predict the end. With Georgia, Mississippi, Florida, Louisiana and Texas rapidly following the lead of South Carolina, there was grave cause for anxiety. The hesitating border States, Virginia, Kentucky and Missouri, became the camping ground

of hostile armies and suffered most from the very beginning of civil war.

As Kentucky was the birthplace of Lincoln and the home of relatives of his wife, he was particularly anxious to silence, as far as possible, opposition to his administration in that commonwealth. Through the influence of Robert J. Breckenridge, and James F. Robinson, who succeeded McGoffin as Governor at Frankfort, Kentucky was saved to the Union, but her gallant sons were conspicuous in both armies.

Soon after the fall of Fort Sumter, General William T. Sherman expressed the opinion that the war would prove something more than a three months' picnic, and Northern radicals bitterly assailed him. He was even denounced as crazy, but Governor Robinson and Mr. Prentice, of the *Louisville Journal*, vigorously protested against his removal. General Sherman was so grateful to Mr. Prentice for his journalistic support that he always made it easy for a representative of the *Journal* to obtain information for publication. I was a member of the *Journal* staff in later years of the war, and was the medium through which the information was conveyed to the type-setters. In the performance of my duties I had ready access to such officers as General W. T. Sherman, General D. C. Buell, General John A. Logan, General George H. Thomas, General John M. Palmer and General Stanley.

The people of the State of South Carolina in convention assembled December 20th, 1860, reasserted their objection to "the election of a man to the high office of President of the United States whose opinions and purposes are hostile to slavery," and, "appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, have solemnly declared that the Union heretofore existing between this State and the other States of North America, is dissolved, and that the State of South Carolina has resumed her position among the nations of the world, as a separate and independent State." This solemn declaration met with applause in the South and was received with grim determination in the North. The voice of Alexander H. Stephens rang clear before the legislature of Georgia and awoke responsive echoes in millions of hearts. "The President of the United States is no emperor, no dictator—he is clothed with no abso-

lute power. He can do nothing unless he is backed by power in Congress. The House of Representatives is largely in a majority against him. . . . Is this the time, then, to apprehend that Mr. Lincoln, with this large majority in the House against him, can carry out any of his unconstitutional principles in that body? . . . Why, then, I say, should we disrupt the ties of this Union when his hands are tied—when he can do nothing against us?” President Lincoln in his inaugural address attempted to allay the fears of the slaveholding section: “Apprehension seems to exist among the people of the Southern States, that, by the accession of a republican administration, their property and their peace and personal security are to be endangered. There has never been any reasonable cause for such apprehension. Indeed, the most ample evidence to the contrary has all the while existed and been open to their inspection. It is found in nearly all the published speeches of him who now addresses you.”

I was young and sanguine at the time, and I could not see how the pathetic closing words could fall on deaf ears: “You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the Government, while I shall have the most solemn one to preserve, protect and defend it. I am loth to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break, our bonds of affection. The mystic cords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot-grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over the broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

The North uprose in response to Lincoln’s call to arms in April, 1861, and for four years the conflict raged. Valor was displayed on both sides, and tears were shed upon myriads of graves. Only those who lived at the front can properly estimate the ruin wrought. The severest possible strain was put upon the manhood and the womanhood of the country. March 4th, 1865, President Lincoln delivered his second inaugural address, and the storm had then spent its force. Andrew Johnson had succeeded to the Vice-President’s chair, and he represented the strong Union sentiment of the mountain districts of Tennessee. An end had been put to drafting and recruit-

ing for the Federal army and to the purchase of munitions of war, and reconstruction was the subject of profound thought. The President was kindly disposed to the vanquished, and his life was never more valuable to the people at large.

Often I had to wait for late dispatches, and the time from 9:30 to 11 P. M. was spent in one of the theatres. Louisville was then a general headquarters, a big camp of wonderful activity, and the theatres did a rushing business. John Wilkes Booth, a striking personality of twenty-six years, played a short engagement, and I saw him in every act, little dreaming that in a comparatively brief spell he would fill an important part in the great drama of the century. I also formed at Louisville the acquaintance of Edwin Adams, and he was playing with Laura Keane in Ford's Theatre, Washington, the night that President Lincoln received his death wound. It was the 14th of April, 1865, and having had a strenuous day, I had gone to bed earlier than usual. A room had been fitted up for me in the office of the *Journal* so that I could promptly respond to any emergency call during the night. I was roused from a deep slumber by the foreman of the composing room, who stood over me with blanched face. It was midnight and I was informed that confused reports from Washington were to the effect that the President and all of his Cabinet had been murdered. Orders were sent to the press room to hold the forms for the latest information. Scores of dispatches were brought to me and I edited them at a little table in the composing room. It was after three o'clock in the morning when threads were untangled and woven into a coherent story.

The rabid zeal of John Wilkes Booth to help the Southern people deeply injured them. Among the members of his fanatical coterie were Lewis Powell, George Atzerodt, David E. Herold, Samuel Arnold, Michael O'Laughlin and John H. Surratt. At noon on Friday, April 14th, Booth was informed that President Lincoln would occupy a box at Ford's Theatre that night, and he quickly planned for the assassination of Lincoln, Vice-President Johnson, and Secretary of State Seward. It is an old story of how Booth obtained access to the President's box, fired the fatal shot and then made a sensational escape. The President was carried to the little house opposite the theatre, 516 Tenth Street, N. W., and at twenty-two minutes past

seven o'clock on Saturday morning, April 15th, he drew his last breath.

On the day after the assassination, Andrew Johnson took the oath as President of the United States, and to one of the delegation that waited upon him he said: "I know it is easy, gentlemen, for anyone who is so disposed to acquire a reputation for clemency and mercy. But the public good imperatively requires a just discrimination in the exercise of these qualities."

Andrew Johnson was as variable in temperament as George D. Prentice claimed him to be, and his administration was sadly disappointing to many of his best friends.

The declaration of Secretary of War Stanton, when the heart of Lincoln ceased to beat,—“Now he belongs to the ages,”—has been verified by the lapse of time. The greatness of the man is recognized even by those who wore the Confederate gray.

At nine o'clock on Saturday morning, April 15th, the body of Mr. Lincoln was taken to the White House, where it remained until the 19th, and then was exposed to public view in the Capitol. On the 21st the journey to the tomb in Springfield, Illinois, commenced.

Mr. Prentice said that he would like to have me represent the *Journal* at Springfield, and on the advice of Mr. Osborne I went to Frankfort and conferred with Governor Bramlette. After a short talk the Governor went to his desk and handed me a commission to represent the State of Kentucky at the funeral of Abraham Lincoln. It was an unsought honor and I greatly appreciated it. Lincoln was born in a cabin in Kentucky, and an adopted Kentuckian from Ohio was sent by the State of Kentucky to pay a final tribute to the remains of the murdered President. I know of no other Kentuckian who held a like commission.

General John M. Palmer, who was a close friend of Lincoln, was in command of the post at Louisville, and he gave me warm letters of commendation to his friends and the friends of Lincoln in Springfield. My reception in the Capital of Illinois was all that could be desired, and as I was there in advance of the funeral, I picked up plenty of gossip.

One of the stories was that Mrs. Lincoln had threatened to bury her husband elsewhere than in Springfield unless the plans were

changed so as to make a double tomb. She wanted to sleep through the ages by the side of the martyr and to catch the reflected glow of his fame. It was a natural wish, but there was objection to it, and the strife threatened to mar the solemnity of the funeral pageant. The demand was conceded and the wife and husband rest side by side in Oak Ridge Cemetery.

I shall never forget the hours that I stood as a guard of honor over the casket, or the reverence of the host which filed past the face of the dead. My youthful imagination was stirred and I stretched forth my hands hoping to imprison a sunbeam from the shores of immortality. It was May 4th when the remains of the distinguished dead were placed in the receiving vault, and when I recall the imposing ceremony, I feel that it sometimes is worth while to bear the troubles of a nation and to suffer martyrdom.

The words which President Lincoln spoke at Gettysburg in November, 1863, often ring in my ears: "We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here; but it can never forget what they did here. It is for the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be dedicated here to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." The words will live as long as the Republic endures.

The great tragedy of April 14th left President Lincoln's family rather poorly provided for. Mrs. Lincoln, embittered by her sudden removal from the White House, the atmosphere of which was pleasant to her, took the radical step of putting personal effects on

exhibition in New York and announcing that they were for sale. The loyal friends of the dead President were startled by this proceeding. The sad, careworn face of Abraham Lincoln was not wholly due to perplexing questions of State. In 1866, a book, *Behind the Scenes*, was published, and it produced a sensation. It was from the pen of Elizabeth Keckley, a bright-eyed, thin-lipped, regular-featured colored woman, who in the early part of the war was the confidential maid of Mrs. Jefferson Davis in Richmond, and in the closing years of strife was the confidential maid of Mrs. Lincoln in Washington. She had taken advantage of her position in each family to preserve personal letters on social and other topics in Government circles, and the extracts given from the letters excited public curiosity and created a large sale for the book. I saw the letters and know that they were genuine. It is difficult to say what would have happened had they fallen into the hands of a modern muckraker.

Mary Todd, who was brought up in the aristocratic atmosphere of Lexington, Kentucky, would never have become the wife of Lincoln had both remained in the State in which they were born. Social barriers were too strong for that. The poor boy of the cabin could not have found an opportunity to meet on equal terms the girl reared in a home of culture with slaves to wait upon her. But change of environment opened the door of opportunity, and there was a marriage in which the fires of affection often burned low. The first love of Abraham Lincoln, as is generally known, was buried in the grave of Ann Rutledge. I gained the impression from my frequent talks with General John M. Palmer that President Lincoln was more anxious to preserve Kentucky to the Union than any other of the border States, for the reason that it was the birthplace of himself and of the mother of his children.

One had to live in debatable territory to understand thoroughly the emotional fluctuations of those strenuous times.